



3 Critical Steps to Maintain a Resilient Nonprofit During COVID-19

Without doubt, the COVID-19 pandemic has placed more nonprofits in peril than any other event in modern history. Imagine an athlete scaling a death-defying mountain path. Her muscles provide the strength she needs to pivot, climb and leap. Likewise, your nonprofit must be strong to pivot when workplace routines change, to climb when help requests rise, and to leap into the winds of uncertainty. You can reach astonishing goals when you're powered by the strength of a well-maintained team. Follow the three critical steps in this guide to keep your nonprofit running through the duration of this crisis and beyond.

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1. Equip Your Staff with the Tools They Need to Stay Productive at Home

If your nonprofit already uses work-from-home strategies as an employee benefit, now is the time to ensure your employees have everything they need to do so long term. **Nearly every organization can establish a telecommuting policy**, but employees will need a certain amount of assistance in setting up an appropriate work space. It's your responsibility to confirm that they have the tools they need to stay productive.

Computers and Internet

If needed, permit employees to take their desktop computers, laptops and other office equipment home. Don't assume that everyone has an appropriate computer system at home or can set up their work computer without support. Along with this, provide appropriate internet access and security protections. **Address security concerns regarding routers and internet along with computers and email.** This includes paying for up-to-date security technology programs (such as Norton, McAfee, ESET or Bitdefender) for the entire team. Clearly outline security protocols for work-from-home staff, such as preserving a computer for staff use only. They might not be aware of all the security you provide at the office and need to learn more about this, especially if they handle sensitive information, payroll, HR, or fundraising.



Phones and Cell Phones

Does your nonprofit rely on communicating by phone? Do you make calls to clients? Does your staff rely on cell phone apps to schedule meetings or complete other tasks? Make sure your team can continue this important work at home by helping with the costs of increased data on cellphones or costs of a landline, if needed. Doing this can help maintain your staff's productivity without increasing their personal expenses.

Electronic Processes

While you're fostering a work-from-home strategy for staff members, you may need to study your general business practices, as well. How does your nonprofit handle funding?

It's critical to stay on top of how you manage incoming and outgoing funds.

For example, if your payroll system has relied on generating pay checks, you should consider switching to a digital system. Direct deposit to an employee's account can spare some at-risk workers from having to visit their bank. If that isn't an option, you can still help employees avoid in-person bank visits by making sure they know how to digitally deposit checks. For other kinds of payments, such as vendor payments, your team should confirm that vendors are still

able to receive funds. This could be a good time to promote digital donations to your organization. Follow current CDC guidelines for methods your staff should use to handle incoming donations by check.



2. Support Employee Mental Health and Well-Being During a Time of Uncertainty

When sent home for extended periods, your staff may start to feel disconnected from coworkers, activities and schedules. They've been inundated with often-conflicting reports of health threats and societal upheaval. Surrounded by such turmoil, it's frightening and stressful to be unsure of what will happen next.

According to the CDC website, stress symptoms due to the pandemic can include fear and worry about their own health and the health of their loved ones. It might mean changes in sleep or eating patterns, or difficulty concentrating. Prolonged exposure to intense stress can worsen chronic health problems and exacerbate pre-existing mental health conditions or substance abuse problems. You can take important steps to address their stress, now, beginning with a **continuous plan of communication**. By doing so, you will be providing immediate relief to those who are still home.

As you carry out your plan to help employees feel less isolated, try using various methods of communicating. While email remains popular, messaging and video chat systems perform better at approaching in-person discussions. Video and document sharing platforms such as Zoom, Cisco WebEx and Microsoft Teams provide simple yet robust connection tools. Encourage team members to dress for work and use their cameras during meetings which can provide a positive psychological impact.



Safeguard Their Wellness

Be sure to check in with individual workers on a regular basis. Team leaders should schedule a weekly one-on-one video chat meeting and also make themselves available, as needed. As managers check on employees' work progress, they should **focus on achievement of objectives rather than stipulated hours**. Some workers may be forced to complete projects at odd times due to family situations. You'll be helping to maintain their mental wellbeing when you support the achievement of their goals in ways that they can manage.

TIP: Arrange to have employees test and address any connectivity issues. Give staff a tech-support number to call or email so they know who to reach. Remember, not all computers have cameras installed, so workers may need to use a phone or an iPad. In all types of meetings, all-hands-on-deck, small groups, and individual check-ins, remember to set a positive, constructive tone.



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Sustaining a Resilient Team

Are you maintaining team spirit? If your team feels cut off from any news regarding the status of their nonprofit employer (let alone their jobs), it will increase their feelings of isolation. Once per week, the head of your organization should address the entire staff to provide updates and encouragement.

Note: If anyone on your team is feeling overwhelmed with emotions like sadness, depression or anxiety, help them reach out to the National Disaster Distress Helpline by calling 1-800-985-5990 or texting TalkWithUs to 66746. **Do not hesitate to call 911 if you suspect someone might be a danger to themselves or others.**

Continue Team Building and Recognition ... Virtually

Once your organization has established a regular schedule of business-related meetings, it's time to **arrange special "Team Building" meetings**. Virtual coffee breaks where coworkers can catch up—people benefit from knowing they're not alone in a difficult time. **Don't forget to celebrate birthdays and work anniversaries**—it's a good way to connect and have everyone feel like part of a community.

3. Beyond the Curve: Preparing for Re-Entry to the Workplace

Throughout the crisis, **effective communication between nonprofit leaders and staff will help to ease concerns about returning to the workplace**. A well-scrutinized safety plan and clear communication regarding its design and implementation will go a long way to resolving fears and, more importantly, safeguard the well-being of your most important resource, your workforce.

Preparing the Workspace

Review and update all organizational policies on working from home—family and medical leave, and sick leave policies. An employee who is sick, or whose family members are sick, may be entitled to leave under FMLA. Additional protections may apply. Stay abreast of government updates, and be prepared for revised best-practice guidelines, so you can adjust your company policies as needed. Be sure to read, understand



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and comply with all official safety protocols. Include worker input—addressing their concerns—as you prepare your organization's guidelines for re-entry. Once finalized, distribute updates to your workforce.

Monitoring Contagion

You will need to inspect your current workspace setup and identify any physical layout changes needed to ensure a safe, socially-distanced work environment before you invite workers back to the office. The reality is that asymptomatic people can still spread the disease, so you'll need to determine whether taking workers' temperature will serve your organization's needs. **Ask anyone who feels ill to stay home — no exceptions.** Your organization and HR team will need to stay nimble so they can follow changing regulations, respond to challenges, and stay ahead of the contagion.

Internal Communications: You must routinely remind workers to

maintain safety protocols. Use signs, emails, intranet messaging—all available communication systems. **Provide supplies, such as masks and if needed, gloves, as well as hand sanitizer and disinfectants.** Be clear that all rules will be enforced and compliance by everyone is mandatory.

Put It to the Test

Testing for active COVID-19 or antibodies is an evolving situation that varies by region. Depending on the status of your location, you might benefit from providing testing or sending employees to local test sites. Be aware that some marketed tests are less accurate. If possible, work with your local university or regional health department to determine the best available sources for tests. **Determine, in advance, what steps you will take if someone tests positive after returning to the office.** Decide how you will communicate that situation to your staff and the authorities. Government guidelines may help with these decisions.

Sequential Reopening: One Step at a Time

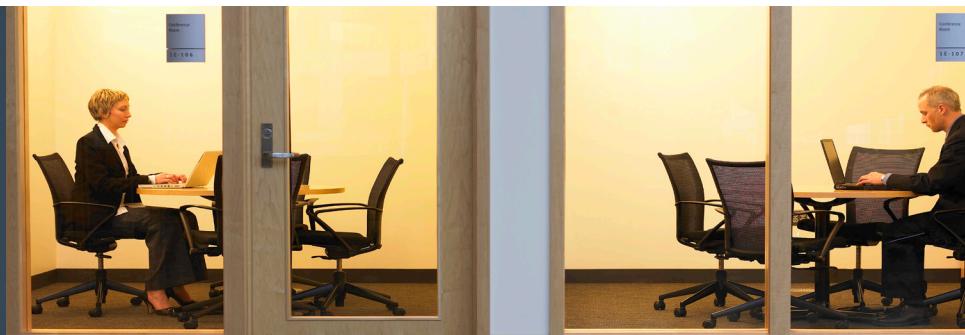
When you're ready to reopen, it's critical to consider the needs of your workers. **The best plans bring workers back in stages.** So, who do you choose first? You should weigh the value of a worker's onsite presence against the safety considerations for that person. Employees who return last should include people in a high-risk category, such as those who have a pre-existing health condition or are caring for others with a compromised immune system.

It's also a time to rethink, in a general sense, **which jobs can be performed from home** or with limited time in the office.

You might be able to combine alternative work schedules with telecommuting opportunities. For example, try split schedules, where workers combine, perhaps, three days at home with two days at the office. For those who must be present at the office, stagger work hours and shifts to limit the number of employees in your workplace at any one time. Splitting schedules can allow your staff to share space, but be sure to disinfect thoroughly between users.

Visit the UST COVID-19 Resource Center designed specifically for nonprofits to find the latest unemployment insights, COVID specific resources, employee wellness tips and more!

www.ChooseUST.org/COVID-19-Resources



Smart Scheduling

Think of three groups: Those who must be physically present at a specific time (such as the leader of a hands-on meeting), those who must be present but with flexible hours (for example, a fundraising coordinator), and finally, those whose presence at the office might only be required on occasion (like your marketing staff). **Flexibility and regular communication are the keys to success in alternative scheduling.**

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TIP: Allow time between all shifts for a cleaning person (or crew) to decontaminate common areas.

Pivot, Climb and Leap

In the end, you won't be able to predict everything that happens. The "new normal" will require flexibility from you and your entire team. Stay on top of strategy development with an eye to what works. Do your best to help employees feel safe. And if required, be ready to close your doors again. Let everyone in your workforce know that their collaboration is crucial. Remind them that, eventually, **life will return to some sort of normal state.** No one can predict exactly how or when it will happen, but share with your team that you firmly believe, as they say, this too shall pass. The key will be maintaining a communicative and responsive team, strong enough to pivot, climb and leap, as needed.



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